

# One rule for the Greens, one for the rest

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■ WATCH: Greens leader Shane Rattenbury lashed Labor, defends handling of Jonathan Davis allegation

The ACT Greens have learnt nothing from recent reviews of federal parliamentary workplace practices despite having voted to beef up the ACT's code of conduct for MLA's just two months ago.

The revised code came into effect on October 9; just weeks before serious allegations against now former MLA Johnathan Davis came to light. It sets out how allegations of bullying, harassment and sexual assault are to be handled in the territory's parliament.

Assembly ethics and integrity adviser, Stephen Skehill's, observation that while he was unaware of any systemic or historic problems "it would be short-sighted and inappropriate to consider that issues of this nature [allegations of sexual impropriety] could not arise in the future" was remarkably prescient.

While it is yet to be determined if the dilatory manner in which the ACT Greens finally made their Labor coalition partners aware of the allegations breached the letter of the code, its principles seem to have been ignored.

Whether or not the code has been breached will almost certainly be one of the questions to be considered by an independent inquiry into the handling of the allegations.



📷 ACT Greens leader Shane Rattenbury. Picture by Karleen Minney

A war of words has broken out between ACT Labor and the Greens over the way in which the junior party kept the allegations under wraps for more than a week.

Labor is critical of the fact that, although Greens minister Emma Davidson knew of them at least as early as October 29, Assembly speaker Joy Burch only learned of them by reading *The Canberra Times* last Friday.

Ms Burch has every reason to feel displeased. Under the Assembly's child safety code of conduct and policy, allegations involving minors must be referred to the speaker - presumably in a timely fashion.

One of the allegations taken to the Greens leadership was Mr Davis had sex with a 15 year old boy. No complainant has come forward but the party deemed the allegation serious enough to take to police.

The other was that he had been in an "inappropriate" but not illegal relationship with a 17 year old male.

Mr Rattenbury, who purports to be miffed because he believes Labor is using the allegations to "create a political advantage", was not told of the allegations until November 6.

This was despite their having been discussed at a meeting between Ms Davidson, two staffers and Mr Rattenbury's chief of staff on October 30.

The decision by those at that meeting not to tell the party leader of the storm clouds that were gathering, on the basis the claims had not been verified, appears remarkable in view of the furore surrounding various allegations about sexual misconduct at Federal Parliament.

They chose, instead, to conduct their own secret review, which, in turn, delayed the reporting of the allegations to the Legislative Assembly and the police.

It also appears to indicate that the culture of cover-up and secrecy which is endemic in the federal Greens is also well-entrenched in the ACT branch.

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It has often been remarked that while the Greens are the first to call for frankness and transparency from others, they are notoriously short on accountability themselves.

That was demonstrated last year by Adam Bandt's refusal to confirm or deny he was investigating allegations that then Greens senator Lidia Thorpe had verbally abused Aunty Geraldine Atkinson to the point she - the complainant - felt physically ill.

It was said at the time that given the Greens purported to practise politics "in a more principled way" Adam Bandt should "practise what he so often preaches".

That now seems a criticism of Shane Rattenbury and his team as well.